Concluding Remarks

Exile and the Setting of Future Research Agendas

by
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Exile has often been the price paid by many after the failure of Latin American authoritarian political systems. Predicated on exclusion from the political community, exile has typically taken place under dictatorships. We should not, however, ignore its recurrent use by formal democratic regimes also too eager to diminish vocal political and intellectual opposition. We should equally be aware of its formative role, expressed in the very name we attribute to the region, "Latin America," which was coined by exiles and sojourners in Paris, among them the Chilean Francisco Bilbao and the Colombian José María Torres Caicedo, in the mid-nineteenth century.

From an experiential perspective, exile opens a series of prospective and retrospective assessments of personal and collective projects while imposing conflicting demands on individuals. Escaping persecution by leaving the home country implies safeguarding one's dignity while risking posttraumatic stress and the dynamic of being treated as a victim. For some, defining oneself and being defined by others as an exile means overcoming the sense of being merely a victim, a depersonalized member of a category without a name. The contrast between studies of political exiles and studies of refugees makes this point clearly. From yet another angle, and especially for those committed to projects of political and cultural transformation, the loss of daily involvement in a community of conationals is immense. As Ariel Dorfman once said, "This is one of the great paradoxes of exile: The very sanctuary that guarantees that a voice has survived, simultaneously cuts that voice off from direct access to the land it is responsible for keeping alive, the land that demands to be transmitted to others" (1998: 204). Similarly, translocation has both constrained and broadened the range of choices and alliances with conationals and others, leading to novel redefinitions of the political and shaping new ways of relating to collective projects in the struggle for democratization of the home societies. Moreover, participation in the host society's political arena can be a prerequisite or a hindrance for sustaining political mobilization against those in power back home (Yankelevich and Franco, this issue). Finally, the tensions and confrontations between the retrospective evaluation of failed projects and the forward-looking perspective of individuals translocated abroad constitute a major axis for future systematic research.

The experience of exile gives rise to a wide range of personal and collective responses to the constraint, challenges, and possibilities presented by translocation (see Rollemberg, this issue). In the *Oxford Book of Exile* John Simpson (1995: 207) reflects on this when he writes,

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> For some, to be out of a country where they have been mistreated is nothing short of a release. For others, it is a tragedy which they will never entirely overcome. Others again look for every opportunity to let the people back home know how successful they have been as a result of leaving. [But] even if they decide to settle there permanently, they never forget their homeland.

Exile is clearly a polychromatic phenomenon, embedded in specific experiences and institutional backgrounds, that has varied in significance and meaning in the course of the waves of repression and exclusion that the countries of the region have undergone. The variety of individual experiences calls for a multiplicity of approaches, but it does not preclude systematic attempts at analyzing the institutional role of exile and exiles in the region. While the articles in this issue reflect the variety of experiences and approaches, they converge in pointing to the institutional significance of exile in Latin American politics since at least the emergence of independent states (see Sznajder and Roniger, this issue; Herzog, 2003). Moreover, bridging political and sociological analysis and domestic and international arenas, the study of political exile may contribute to shaping a research agenda that stresses the transnational structure of Latin American politics.

As time widens the gap between the actual events and the present, and as former exiles' life histories unfold, new possibilities for investigation open up. While death and prison have been the fate of many political and social activists, many more have been expelled or have become expatriates dreaming of their lost homeland and planning their return. Translocation and life in exile have triggered new experiences and alliances. Little work has been done on the long-term effects of exile on the second generation, both for those who remain in a new country and those who have returned home to democracy. Some children of political émigrés likely rejected the activism of their parents and their lands of origin and embraced new countries and cultures. Others probably continued some sort of political activism in the tradition of their parents. It is of special importance to analyze under what set of circumstances these choices were made.

Wright and Onãte (this issue) have suggested a number of ways in which returnees affected the political landscape in their home countries after years abroad. Nonetheless, our understanding of this aspect is still partial. More attention needs to be given to the impact of exile groups, solidarity committees, and human rights efforts on the internal dynamics and political contradictions within the military regimes that expelled their opponents. We need more studies analyzing the role of exiles in the international campaigns against torture, for example, and the way in which they influence government policies regarding the treatment of imprisoned dissidents. What tangible effects did activities to isolate dictatorships have on the political processes in those countries? Conversely, how did the campaigns waged by exiles transform their host countries? Can we measure the effect of exile on the thousands of non-Latin Americans who received people, offered them support, and engaged in international solidarity? In what ways did the interaction between exiles and their hosts create a different political dynamic in these countries? Future studies should be able to indicate whether there is a palpable long-term trace of the exile experience in societies that were once under military control. Of special interest is the analysis of the ways in which former exiles

construct the history of their experiences abroad in the public realm, as politicians or public figures, and the weight of the symbolic capital of exile. In parallel, we need to understand whether and how exiles overcame the stigma they often faced upon return and the ongoing echo of exile in images and representations as memories of the years of political repression fade.

In research about the development of the feminist and new social movements in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, scholars have pointed to the influence of left-wing exiles who adopted new ideas and ideologies about gender relations and power while living abroad (see, e.g., Markarian, 2005). The uprooting experience of living in unfamiliar social territories in many cases opened up new forms of relating the personal to the political. To what extent did exile offer political activists innovative ways to think about political and social change beyond renewed activism in political parties and left-wing movements? How did the exposure to shifting ideologies and political events affect the ways in which these activists engaged in the reconstitution of political alliances and projects? How did the new ideas about race, gender, class, and identity that the exiles encountered abroad change as returnees renewed their links with their countries of birth?

Finally, the neoliberal wave of economic and social policies that has swept the continent during the past two decades may face challenges and resistance, albeit moderate, if left-leaning electoral trends continue. Is it merely the case that returnees have played a moderate and pragmatic role in pointing center-left electoral coalitions toward conciliation and accommodation? Or have political leaders who have lived abroad brought back more sophisticated understandings of global processes that have enabled them to manipulate international economic, social, and political imbalances of power and resources more effectively?

Most of these open-ended questions point toward research that measures the impact of exile on people, political processes, and national memories of the years of political repression. While scholars are looking toward the macrodynamics of exile, continued consideration should be given to the detailed study of émigrés from different countries living abroad. At the same time, researchers should pay special attention to gathering and preserving personal and institutional archives and eliciting oral histories from those who have experienced exile. The challenge will be to connect these microhistories and testimonies in systematic studies of the macrodynamics of exile, with greater emphasis on transnational political trends within Latin America.

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